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21 February 2026

Laughter, Scandal and the Restoration Stage



We're delighted to bring you another edition of the VANBRUGH300 newsletter, warmly welcoming both returning readers and those discovering our celebration for the first time. As we mark this special anniversary year, we continue to explore the life, work and legacy of Sir John Vanbrugh: a figure who was as provocative as he was popular.

Our March edition, *Laughter, Scandal and the Restoration Stage*, turns the spotlight on Vanbrugh the dramatist: bold, witty, and unafraid to stir controversy. Long before Blenheim and Castle Howard defined his architectural reputation, Vanbrugh made his name in the theatre, where sharp satire and social scandal delighted audiences and unsettled critics in equal measure.

We're thrilled to feature Dr Annette Rubery's insightful article on [Vanbrugh as a playwright](#), exploring the daring brilliance of his comedies and the theatrical world that shaped them. From the Restoration stage to the modern screen, we also trace [Vanbrugh's enduring cultural presence](#) - most recently seen in the renewed fascination with his architecture through productions such as *Bridgerton*, where his dramatic buildings once again provide a fittingly opulent backdrop.

We reflect on Professor Anthony Geraghty's [recent lecture](#) exploring the minds that shaped the English Baroque: Sir Christopher Wren, Sir John Vanbrugh, and Nicholas Hawksmoor. We also shine a spotlight on the new exhibition at the Sir John Soane's Museum [Vanbrugh: The Drama of Architecture](#), before turning to the [festival's recent press coverage](#).

To learn more about VANBRUGH300, [visit our website](#) and explore the [What's On](#) page to see upcoming events and activities.

[Visit the VANBRUGH300 Website](#)

John Vanbrugh, the Playwright By Annette Rubery



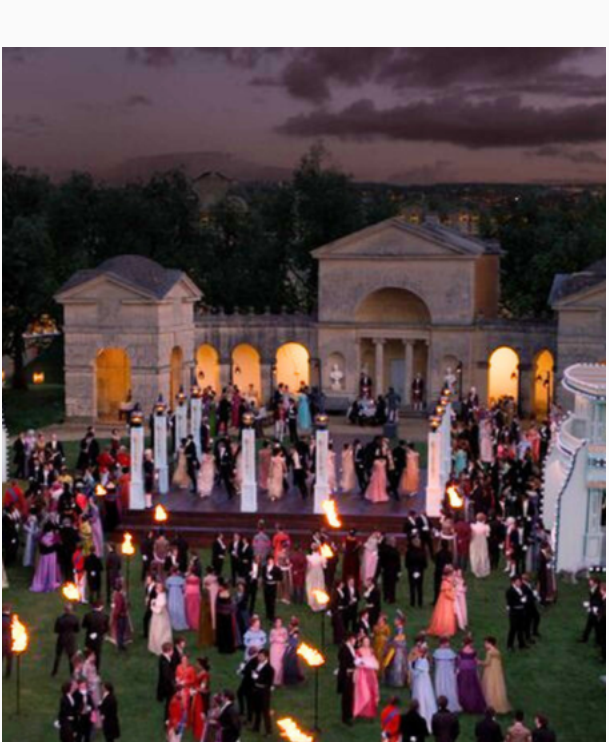
The curtain lifted on John Vanbrugh's theatrical career in 1696, but he was probably writing plays from a much earlier date. His first play, *The Relapse, or, Virtue in Danger*, premiered in November 1696 at Drury Lane (one of two official London theatres in this period). It was unusual for a debut because it was a sequel to another play, the sentimental comedy *Love's Last Shift, or The Fool in Fashion*, which had appeared earlier that year. The latter was written by Colley Cibber – an actor at Drury Lane – who cast himself as the top, Sir Novelty Fashion. The play was popular, not least because of Cibber's performance, but its sentimentalism clearly struck a chord with Vanbrugh, who set out to write a response... [\[READ MORE\]](#)

Vanbrugh: From Stage to Screen Bridgerton's Baroque

The theatrical grandeur of Sir John Vanbrugh's architecture continues to captivate new audiences, most recently through Netflix's lavish period drama *Bridgerton*. A playwright as well as an architect, Vanbrugh understood spectacle, emotion and staging; it is perhaps no surprise that his bold Baroque houses translate so effortlessly to the screen. Across recent seasons, including the newly released instalment, several Vanbrugh300 partner houses have provided dramatic backdrops to *Bridgerton's* world of romance and intrigue, proving that his architecture remains as powerful in cinematic storytelling as it was in the eighteenth century.

Castle Howard – Season 1, Episode 6 (2020)

The House, gardens and wider estate take centre stage in Episode 6, including the Temple of the Four Winds, designed by Vanbrugh himself. It is here that the Duke and Duchess seek shelter from a torrential downpour, and the effect of this required a lot of special effects and teamwork between the production company and Castle Howard. [\[Find out more\]](#)



Stowe House – Series 1, Episode 1 (2020)

Standing in for London's legendary Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, Stowe's landscape became the glittering heart of Regency nightlife in the opening episode. A full dance floor was constructed in front of the Temple of Venus, alongside a two-storey bandstand inspired by 18th-century descriptions of Vauxhall. With 2km of festoon lighting, fireworks and pyrotechnic pyramids, Vanbrugh's dramatic setting was transformed into a dazzling 4am spectacle. [\[Find out more\]](#)

Blenheim Palace – Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (2023)

In the *Bridgerton* prequel *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*, Blenheim becomes the opulent Buckingham House. The connection is more than cinematic: the real Queen Charlotte and King George III visited the 4th Duke and Duchess of Marlborough at Blenheim, inspiring renovations at Buckingham House. Vanbrugh's architecture thus bridges fiction and history - on screen and in real life. [\[Find out more\]](#)



Grimsthorpe Castle – Season 3, Episode 3 (2024)

Filming for Season 3 brought *Bridgerton* to Grimsthorpe for a month, with key scenes shot in the Vanbrugh Hall and Vanbrugh Courtyard, as well as along the estate's private roads for carriage sequences. Hosting over 200 cast and crew, the estate once again demonstrated how Vanbrugh's grand architectural staging continues to rise effortlessly to modern cinematic scale. [\[Find out more\]](#)

Images courtesy of @Netflix

Wren, Vanbrugh, and Hawksmoor: The Minds that Made the English Baroque

As part of the Vanbrugh300 celebrations, we were delighted to attend a lecture by Professor Anthony Geraghty at St John's College, Oxford, introduced by Professor William Whyte as the inaugural lecture in memory of Sir Howard Montagu Colvin, to whom Professor Geraghty paid warm tribute.

The lecture revisited one of the most remarkable moments in British architectural history: the emergence of the English Baroque around 1700. Looking afresh at Sir Christopher Wren, Nicholas Hawksmoor, and Sir John Vanbrugh, Professor Geraghty offered compelling new interpretations of their haunting and dramatic designs. He explored how each architect grounded his work in distinct philosophical first principles, and how the convergence of these powerful and differing artistic personalities gave birth to a bold and original architectural language.



[Watch the Lecture](#)

Vanbrugh: The Drama of Architecture at Sir John Soane's Museum



Vanbrugh: The Drama of Architecture at Sir John Soane's Museum. Photo: Gareth Gardner.

From 4 March to 28 June, Sir John Soane's Museum presents Vanbrugh: The Drama of Architecture, a major new (and free) exhibition marking 300 years since the death of Sir John Vanbrugh. Celebrating the architect behind some of Britain's most iconic country houses, including Blenheim Palace and Castle Howard, the exhibition reintroduces Vanbrugh as a defining figure of the English Baroque.

Curated by Sir Charles Saumarez Smith CBE and architect Roz Barr, the exhibition brings together never-before-exhibited drawings from the collections of the V&A and Soane's Museum, including works in Vanbrugh's own hand. It also explores his enduring influence, from his contemporaries Nicholas Hawksmoor and Sir Christopher Wren to 20th-century architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

[Book your Tickets!](#)

Vanbrugh300 Press Coverage



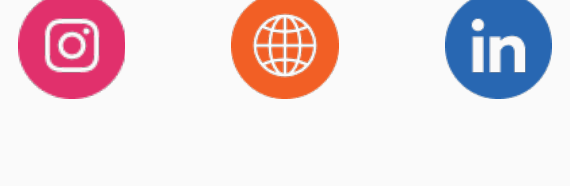
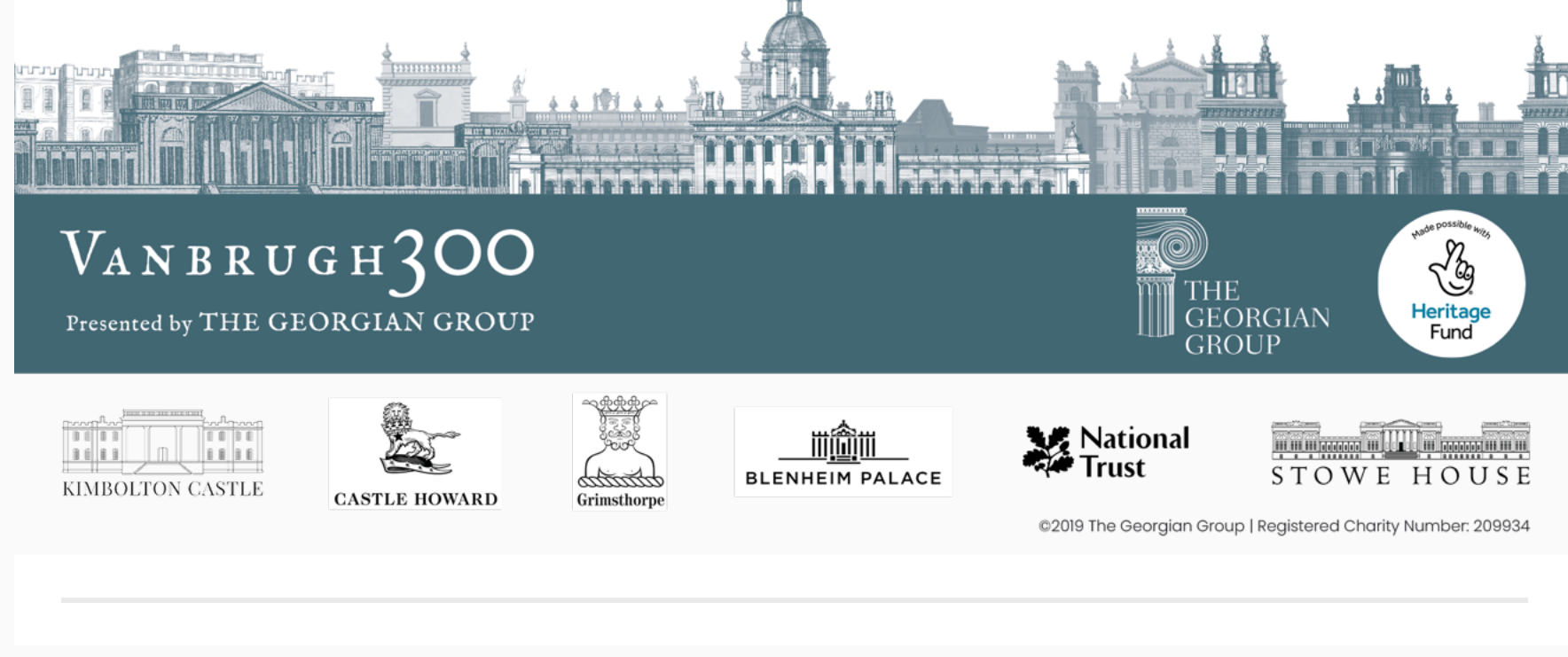
On Saturday 28 February, we were delighted to see fantastic coverage of the Vanbrugh300 festival, with features in *The Times*, *The Spectator*, and *The Arts Society Magazine*.

Laura Freeman's feature in *The Times* explores the scandalous and brilliant mind behind some of Britain's finest country houses, highlighting the Georgian Group's nationwide celebrations and shining a spotlight on each of the partner houses. In *The Spectator*, Jonathan Meades reflects on the genius of John Vanbrugh and discusses Charles Saumarez-Smith's recent book, *Vanbrugh: The Drama of Architecture*. Meanwhile, Rory Fraser's five-page feature in *The Arts Society Magazine* charts Vanbrugh's remarkable life and works as this year-long festival gets underway. [\[READ MORE\]](#)

Dates for your Diary

- **19 March** - [Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh](#): A Talk by Charles Saumarez Smith
- **20 March** - [Interview with Charles Saumarez Smith and Annette Rubery](#) on Vanbrugh: The Drama of Architecture at Lichfield Festival
- **25-28 March** - [Projection Artwork: 'The Cast of Players' at Seaton Delaval Hall](#)
- **26 March** - A [commemoration service](#) held at St Stephen Walbrook
- **28 March** - [Seaton Delaval Hall VANBRUGH300 Weekend](#)
- **31 March** - [Vanbrugh in India](#): an Online Talk by Rory Fraser

[Explore the full programme at Vanbrugh300.co.uk](#)



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